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ABSTRACT

In this project, eighth grade students are exposed to black history, literature, music, and art to enhance the understanding of diversity and to establish an atmosphere of tolerance for diversity. Students are asked to choose a personality or significant historical event to research and present to the class. They focus on issues such as prejudice, tolerance, and discrimination, and how they relate to their topic. Students become more aware of U.S. cultures and black diversity while understanding the need for tolerance. Suggested reading texts are: "To Kill a Mocking Bird"; "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry"; and "The Contender." Through the study of black culture, students of all ethnic groups come away with greater awareness, appreciation, and tolerance of cultural differences and perspectives. They can adapt their new knowledge to other situations. (JAG)

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"TOLERANCE THROUGH EXPOSURE"

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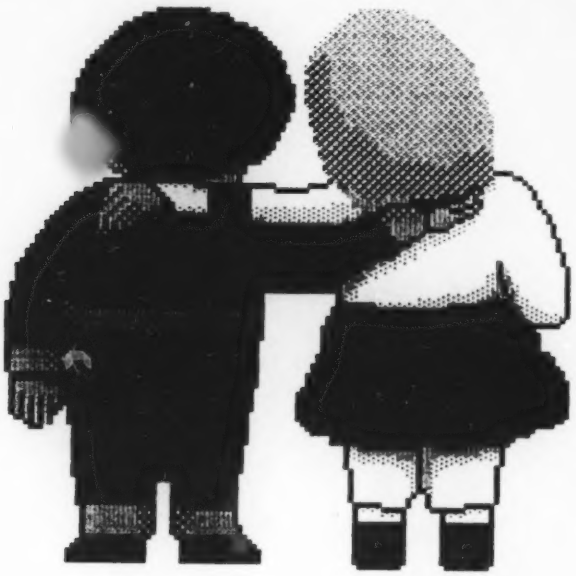

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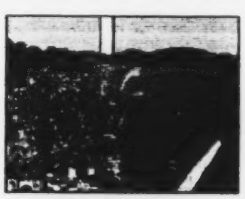
TOLERANCE THROUGH EXPOSURE

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This project focuses on African-American literature, social studies, music, and art to enhance the understanding of diversity and to establish an atmosphere of tolerance for diversity.

Using a young-adult novel dealing with the African-American experience as the core for instruction, students delve into the historical and social aspects that make the African-American experience unique. Students review U.S. history and its ramifications on African-Americans to help set the stage for study. They utilize this knowledge by making real life comparisons to events in the novel. For example, students study the economic implications of slave trade and the impact of the cotton industry on labor speculating on its impact on the novel's characters.



Students select an African-American personality, or significant historical event to research. Students share their information with the class and create a quilt square which symbolizes their research. The quilt squares are then connected and the quilt displayed. The effect is dramatic.

Students focus on prejudice, tolerance, and discrimination. As a class we move from examples in the text to examples in their lives. Through discussion, problem solving, and role play students take a critical look at

themselves, the community, and the nation. Their perspective is widened as they see the ramifications of their actions.

We concentrate on the fine arts through the study of high quality reproductions of original work by accomplished artists. These prints include some created in the 1700s to others created in the 1980s. We study the techniques, but spend much of the time using these prints as writing prompts.

Because music is so important to adolescents we spend class time looking at the impact African-Americans had/have on American music. The school's band director shares his expertise with a spirited lecture interspersed with recordings and live music. This leads to a discussion students find interesting and valuable.

PARTICIPANTS

All eighth grade students in my language arts classes are exposed to this project. They read the required material and gain a deeper understanding of the African-American experience. A regular classroom teacher can implement this program, although the unit is geared to a team of multi-disciplinary teachers. The strongest team would include representatives from language arts, social studies, art, and music.

GOALS

The outcome of this project is to enhance social awareness and responsibility through exposure to a different culture here in the United States. Through gained knowledge and insight students' tolerance of diversity will deepen as they become aware of the adversity and contributions made by the African-American minority. The time frame for this thematic unit is approximately five weeks. I usually start it at the beginning of the third quarter and it runs through the last week of February.

RESOURCES

Classroom reading texts are necessary. I have successfully used To Kill A Mockingbird, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, and The Contender. Access to research is also a must. The school library and librarian serves this purpose. The African-American prints are extremely helpful in setting climate and as writing prompts. These prints cost approximately $125. for a set of twelve. As mentioned before, a specialist in music and art is useful.

CONCLUSION

Exposure and education together accelerate tolerance. This unit is an adaptable, creative and safe way to show students the importance of cultural differences and perspectives. It enhances social awareness and improves student tolerance of diversity. Students are extremely responsive to this topic and approach. It allows students to be both interspective and introspective. The beauty of this project is its adaptability. This unit of study can be used for any ethnic group in the United States.